United Nations A/51/PV.12

General Assembly
Fifty-first Session

Official Records

12th plenary meeting
Friday, 27 September 1996, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Razali Ismail ..... (Malaysia)

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 9 *(continued)*

General debate

The President: I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade of Iceland, His Excellency Mr. Halldór Ásgrímsson.

Mr. Ásgrímsson (Iceland): May I congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly and pledge to you the full support of my delegation.

During the past fiftieth-anniversary year, the States Members of the United Nations have reaffirmed their support for the fundamental purposes and principles of the Organization. The momentum created by the anniversary must now be used to adapt the Organization to new realities. To this end, both structural and financial reforms must be undertaken, setting priorities and reallocating limited resources. But the point of the exercise must not be simple cost-cutting. What we need above all is a stronger, not a weaker, Organization, better capable of dealing with the enormous global challenges of the twenty-first century.

There is no alternative to the United Nations. The further evolution of the Organization is therefore inevitable. But the Organization will not evolve in a commonly acceptable direction under duress. Agreement on and implementation of necessary reforms will only be achieved in a spirit of dialogue and accommodation.

This applies not least to the ongoing work to adapt the Security Council. Changes in its composition and working methods should remain a priority. The Council must better reflect political and economic realities in a rapidly changing world. Its continued effectiveness depends on a constructive contribution by all its members, as well as on equitable representation and manageable size. There should be a geographically balanced expansion of seats in both the permanent and non-permanent categories, including permanent seats for Germany and Japan. We should ensure that small and medium-sized States have the possibility to be represented in the Council.

The United Nations system must be strengthened further in the fields of economic and social policy and development. The revitalization of the Economic and Social Council is important if the Council is to serve as an important venue for coordination and policy-making on issues which affect our daily existence. Iceland is a candidate for election to the Economic and Social Council for the next term and is prepared to contribute constructively to the work of the Council and to the debate on its future.

Mr. Baumanis (Latvia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The signing of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) this week will be remembered as an important step towards limiting the nuclear-arms race and setting us on the path of genuine nuclear disarmament. I

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would like to urge Member countries to sign and ratify the Treaty as soon as possible.

The proliferation of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction is of continuous concern to the international community. Unconditional and universal adherence to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the chemical weapons and biological weapons Conventions, and now the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is a critical step towards eliminating weapons that threaten life on our planet.

But the horrors associated with weapons of mass destruction must not blind us to the widespread suffering caused by increasingly destructive conventional arms. Landmines especially are a growing menace, indiscriminately maiming and killing innocents no less than combatants. Iceland strongly supports a comprehensive ban on the use, production and export of anti-personnel landmines.

In the aftermath of the cold war, it has become increasingly clear how prolonged regional conflicts can have serious international implications. Events in Iraq are only the most recent example. Such conflicts need to be addressed in a comprehensive manner by the United Nations. In addition to the important function of the Security Council, the wider United Nations system should be employed more actively to prevent armed conflicts as well as to assist in the reconstruction of societies emerging from war. Vigilance towards threats or acts of aggression which can erode regional or international stability is a necessary part of such preventive activity. International terrorism is aggression by unconventional means. Its victims are mainly civilians. The use or sanction of terrorism by individual States is unacceptable. The action of the international community should properly reflect the universal abhorrence of alliances between terrorists and individual States.

The sinister scheming of terrorists and organized crime is of growing concern, not least since it is frequently based on illicit drug trafficking. The United Nations can do much to enhance international cooperation in crime prevention and in the suppression of drug trafficking across national boundaries. Iceland supports the holding of a special session of the General Assembly in 1998 devoted to drug control.

The international community must move swiftly to enhance respect for relevant human rights instruments in areas of conflict. The establishment of international war crimes tribunals is a step in the right direction, provided they receive the cooperation necessary to fulfil their mandate from all parties concerned.

Through a series of international conferences, the Organization has, during the past few years, addressed the most important issues facing humankind. These conferences have highlighted both the enormity of our task and the complex interrelationship between the various global issues we are often called upon to deal with, be they absolute poverty, environmental degradation, overpopulation, human rights abuses or social injustice. Having concluded this unprecedented series of conferences with the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements in Istanbul last June, we owe it to future generations to join hands and spare no effort to implement the decisions reached.

Universal human rights are the foundation on which we base the work of the United Nations. This includes the safeguarding of gender equality and the rights of the most vulnerable groups in society: the poor and the disabled. Children are increasingly the target of atrocities in war and of human rights violations. Six years after the World Summit for Children we still must do a better job of honouring our commitments to children. In this context, Iceland welcomes in particular the recommendations of the Stockholm World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and wishes to see them followed up as soon as possible.

Hunger and malnutrition are shameful phenomena on the eve of the twenty-first century. With the resources at its disposal, the international community should be able to provide food security for the whole of mankind. The forthcoming World Food Summit will hopefully secure a commitment at the highest political level to rapidly achieve this objective.

As a country owing its survival and prosperity to the harvesting of living marine resources, Iceland has consistently underlined the potential of the oceans as a major source of nutrition. Icelandic fisheries have developed experience and technology which could benefit others. The Government of Iceland is prepared to facilitate international cooperation in this field. Iceland has contributed actively to the establishment of international law governing the protection and sustainable utilization of the oceans. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea has already proven to be a historic

success in the field of international law and remains among the greatest achievements of the United Nations.

The seas and the ocean floors are the depositories of enormous resources. The agreement of the international community on an extensive legal framework on this subject is therefore a major accomplishment. The Convention offers the prospect of resolving serious conflicts on the uses of the seas which could be detrimental to international cooperation. The Convention has already provided the basis for further agreements, such as the recently concluded Agreement relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks.

Iceland has actively participated in the adoption of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities. Pollution of this sort is responsible for over 80 per cent of all marine pollution. In order to facilitate the implementation of the Programme, a draft resolution on institutional arrangements will be addressed by the General Assembly at this session.

However, major challenges remain. Controlling the use of persistent organic pollutants needs to be addressed. Iceland welcomes the proposal put forward within the United Nations Environment Programme to establish an international committee in 1997 with the aim of reaching a global agreement on this question.

This year, Iceland celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of its membership in the United Nations. We have strongly emphasized constructive participation. This reflects our belief in the importance of multilateral cooperation for smaller States and, in particular, in the hopes and aspirations attached to the world Organization.

The United Nations is ideally capable of achievements in specific areas which are beyond the reach of national or regional authorities. However, it will never attain the capacity to meet all expectations. As Member States debate reforms, I would like to emphasize the importance of setting priorities and making them well known. The shaping of a new United Nations suited for the twenty-first century must be complemented by vigorous information efforts with the aim of ensuring continued public confidence and support.

The Acting President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Her Excellency Ms. Tarja Kaarina Halonen.

Ms. Halonen (Finland): Let me offer Ambassador Razali my sincerest congratulation on his election as President of the General Assembly. This session will address many difficult and important questions. I am confident that under his experienced and wise leadership we shall achieve good and constructive results. I should also like to express the thanks and appreciation of my Government to the Secretary-General and to the many dedicated women and men in the Secretariat.

Let me refer to the statement made by the Deputy Prime Minister of Ireland on behalf of the European Union. My Government fully endorses that statement.

As the United Nations enters its fifty-first year, one conclusion is self-evident: questions of peace, development and human rights can no longer be neatly separated. They interact, and nowhere more so than at the United Nations.

Let me begin with human rights. There can be no sustainable peace in societies where the human rights of individuals are not respected or where their democratic aspirations are denied. Widespread violations of human rights, including the rights of minorities, breed instability and conflict. The United Nations is then, often too late, called upon to deal with them. There can be no sustainable development in societies where economic and social rights, as well as political rights, are flouted. Authoritarian rule is no answer to poverty or environmental degradation. The universality of human rights cannot be questioned. True, civilizations differ; societies differ. But that does not mean that cultural, religious, ideological or any other factors can be invoked as legitimate justifications for human rights violations. To do so is to deny the inherent equality of human beings.

But adherence to general principles is not enough. The litmus test is, of course, practice. Here at the United Nations we must ask ourselves what we can do together to promote respect for human rights. I see at least three areas where the General Assembly can and should act.

First, we must see to it that the United Nations mechanisms that have been created to promote and monitor respect for human rights are not impaired through lack of funds. The High Commissioner for Human Rights, his special rapporteurs and the human rights treaty bodies within the United Nations system are entitled to our support. The General Assembly should insist on the necessary funding.

Secondly, we must help establish, in accordance with the conclusions of the Preparatory Committee, a permanent international criminal court to deal with flagrant violations of international humanitarian law and human rights. I do not have to belabour the reasons why. One look at Rwanda or the former Yugoslavia is enough.

Thirdly, we must ensure sustained and integrated follow-up of the United Nations conferences from Vienna to Istanbul, so as to implement fully the agreed programmes of action. Nationally, Governments must commit the resources necessary to make the agreed actions a reality. In the case of the Vienna and Beijing Conferences in particular, full and equal enjoyment of human rights by all women everywhere must be the first goal towards which the United Nations and all Governments must aspire.

In Finland, women gained full political rights — the right to vote and, just as important, the right to be eligible for Parliament — as early as 1906; that is, 90 years ago. Finland thus became the very first country in the world where this was made possible. We have come a long way since then, but we still need to do better until, finally, women are just as equally empowered in Finnish society as men. I know that the same is true to varying degrees in other countries too.

Children, whether girls or boys, are full-fledged subjects of human rights. Almost universal ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has been achieved. States Parties must now ensure universal implementation too. The message from the recent Stockholm World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children was clear: full implementation of children's rights is also the best guarantee against sexual exploitation. The United Nations must now, along with Governments, follow up the commitments of Stockholm, and with vigour.

Even the most democratic societies are vulnerable to conflicts, even to armed ones. We should therefore do our utmost to prevent them and, to this end, make full use of all means available to the international community.

Finland believes in United Nations peacekeeping. We have participated for 40 years and stand ready to continue. The sheer complexity of modern-day conflicts has turned United Nations thinking towards comprehensive peace operations. Peacekeeping must be seen as a part of a comprehensive peace process. We welcome this approach. The civilian and military elements of a peace operation should operate in close cooperation. Artificial barriers separating the two should be eliminated right at the outset in devising the mandate for an operation. It is also important that peace operations be linked with longer-term peace-building efforts to promote stability and sustainable human development.

Lessons have been learned the hard way in the past few years. United Nations peacekeepers are not suited for peace enforcement. That job should and can be entrusted by the Security Council to others — whether regional organizations or other outside ad hoc coalitions — if necessary. But these are exceptional cases. For the vast majority of conflicts, the United Nations will be the one called upon for peacekeeping. Even if the United Nations must be able to say no on occasions, the world Organization cannot shirk its responsibility. Moreover, when the United Nations acts, it should act on time and with the support of its members, including funding.

The President returned to the Chair.

Time is of the essence in responding to crises. Further development of the existing standby arrangements with Member States is the most practical way to enhance the rapid-reaction capability of the Organization. Therefore, Finland strongly supports the establishment of a rapidly deployable headquarters unit at the United Nations as soon as possible.

Prevention, naturally, is better than cure. In peacekeeping as well, preventive deployment is an innovation that is working right now in The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Finland is convinced that the United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP) operation is making a crucial contribution to stability in the whole region. It is a full-fledged operation in preventive diplomacy encompassing good offices, monitoring and human and institutional development, as well as troop deployment. That contribution, based on the present mandate, should continue until peace and stability in the whole region are better assured.

This is the year of the nuclear-test ban. That is what the General Assembly demanded a year ago, and that is what the vast majority of the world's nations has now agreed. I was proud to sign the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty for my country. That Treaty will strengthen the security of all of us, without exception. Banning nuclear-test explosions is a goal to which the international community has been committed for decades.

The Treaty accomplishes that goal. At the same time, the Treaty is a step towards the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons.

However, focusing on nuclear weapons is not enough. We also need to focus on weapons that maim and kill people today. Those weapons are conventional weapons, particularly landmines, other small arms and light weapons.

The excessive accumulation and proliferation of small arms threaten to destabilize communities, countries and entire regions. A United Nations expert panel, on which my country is represented, is looking into the problem right now. Finland, for one, expects concrete recommendations on how to deal with this clear and present danger nationally, regionally and through the United Nations.

The indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines is the most visible manifestation of the small-arms emergency. When they finally achieve peace, societies already ravaged by years of war are severely hampered in their reconstruction efforts by landmines that have been indiscriminately sown by the millions. A concerted international effort, led by the United Nations, is needed to assist in mine clearance. Demining should also be made an integral part of peacekeeping mandates, as was recently suggested by Germany and endorsed by the Security Council.

It is increasingly clear, however, that in the end only a prohibition of inhumane and indiscriminate landmine use can bring a real solution. To be effective, such a solution must be legally binding, global and verifiable. As the first step, all States should adhere to and abide by the significantly strengthened landmine Protocol to the Convention on conventional weapons. I find it very hard to understand why two out of three United Nations Member States continue to remain outside that Convention.

As a concurrent step Finland proposes the initiation of global negotiations on a treaty banning anti-personnel landmines altogether. A natural forum for such negotiations would be the single negotiating body for disarmament that the international community has at its disposal, namely, the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.

Finland will work actively for the inclusion of a ban on anti-personnel landmines in the negotiating agenda of the Conference on Disarmament when the Conference reconvenes in January.

In assisting in the creation of conditions of stability and well-being, the United Nations has effective economic and social tools at its disposal. A review of how the United Nations does its business in this field is under way. The approval in May of the resolution on restructuring and revitalization of some areas in the Economic and Social Council sector was an encouraging sign.

The yardstick in measuring United Nations impact on development should be how the Organization has been able to alleviate poverty and contribute to the improvement of the quality of life. The first priority now, as we see it, should be to assess the impact of the development activities of the United Nations system at the country level. We were pleased to note that last year the General Assembly initiated a process to that effect.

I have two remarks in this regard. First, it is necessary to concentrate United Nations development activities on the poorest countries and the most vulnerable groups of society. Secondly, better integration of the United Nations at the country level would enhance efficiency. It would promote closer coordination between development activities, on the one hand, and humanitarian and peacekeeping activities on the other.

The commitments made at recent United Nations conferences provide a comprehensive agenda for follow-up. One of the conferences, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, will be prominently present at this fifty-first session of the General Assembly. That Conference is a promising example of the capabilities of the United Nations. It has made global environmental concerns an everyday reality for all of us. The follow-up session next year will afford a unique opportunity to assess progress and review priorities.

In my view, one of the emerging priorities would be a political commitment at the global level for sustainable forest management. Finland attaches great importance to the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests, which has been established and which expects to submit concrete action-oriented recommendations to the special session.

Before concluding my statement, I wish to refer to the statement issued by the Presidency of the European Union yesterday regarding the killings and violent incidents in the West Bank and Gaza. I want to state that my Government fully endorses that statement. On behalf of the Government of Finland, I appeal to the parties

concerned to take every measure to restore calm and refrain from acts of violence and provocation. We also urge the parties to re-engage the peace process, which had already achieved such promising results.

In view of the Security Council's primary role in the maintenance of international peace and security, the reform of the Council is of particular urgency. The discussions on this subject during the fiftieth session were thorough and useful. Convergence of views emerged on many important issues, yet on others, differences still remain. I believe that the time is now ripe to take a step forward and engage in real negotiations on a comprehensive reform of the Council.

Meanwhile, in a few weeks we shall elect new non-permanent members to the present Security Council. As is well known, the five Nordic Countries give their full support to Sweden. I am confident that the other Member States will also recognize the merits of our neighbouring country.

The Deputy Prime Minister of Ireland, Mr. Dick Spring, when speaking on behalf of the European Union, underlined the obligation of all Member States to pay their arrears and their assessed contributions to the United Nations. Finland having been the first Member State to pay in full, on time and without conditions its assessed contribution to the regular budget of the United Nations in 1996, I feel it both my right and my duty to reiterate that appeal.

The United Nations, we agree, needs renewed focus and streamlining. Let us now find the determination and will to proceed with the necessary reform.

Address by Dato' Seri Mahathir Mohamad, Prime Minister of Malaysia

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of Malaysia.

Dato' Seri Mahathir Mohamad, Prime Minister of Malaysia, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming the Prime Minister of Malaysia, His Excellency Dato' Seri Mahathir Mohamad, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Mahathir (Malaysia): I am happy to acknowledge a Malaysian as the President of the General Assembly, a first for Malaysia. We are thankful to all Member States for their support, especially the members of the Asian Group, which endorsed Malaysia's candidature early.

I would like to think that the selection has to do with Malaysia's efforts and involvement, with the United Nations and globally. Within three years of Malaysia's independence, we were involved in United Nations peacekeeping operations in the Congo. Today in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Malaysia is perhaps the only developing country participating in the peacekeeping forces led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), paying in full the cost of our involvement. Malaysia will continue to participate in international activities, United Nations-sponsored or otherwise, combining altruism with enlightened self-interest.

This time last year, there was much celebration as the United Nations attained its fiftieth year. Amid the celebrations extolling the achievements of the United Nations, there were serious concerns expressed about the relevance and effectiveness of this Organization and the need for democratic reforms so that the United Nations could better fulfil the purposes and principles of the Charter. The fiftieth anniversary came and went and, despite the extravaganza, very little has been achieved.

The Organization itself remains far removed from the aspirations of the peoples of the United Nations, which it is supposed to promote and protect. Hopefully, the tragedy of Bosnia and Herzegovina will, with international help, be on the mend, but Palestine's hopes and aspirations have been undermined by the new Israeli Government, which is backed, unfortunately, by some Western Powers, and is backtracking on painfully negotiated agreements. At this moment, a rash decision by Israel not only imperils further the peace process, with lives being lost, but can inflame and outrage Muslim States and Muslim society if the sanctity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque is defiled. In Africa, Somalia, Rwanda and Liberia remain on the razor's edge of survival, and Burundi awaits United Nations and regional initiatives to avoid a catastrophe. And there are countries such as Afghanistan, victims of the cold war, abandoned by the major Powers, needing help to reconstruct and overcome the destruction wrought by war. And what will be the fate of tiny Chechnya and its valiant people, facing the full onslaught of mighty Russia?

While some developing countries become fragmented and marginalized, the process of accruing

power and benefits continues with the major countries, aided by their control of the Security Council, their monopoly on nuclear power and their economic high ground. One sees various twists and turns, double standards and selectivity, as the dictates of domestic politics overrule justice and humanitarianism in international affairs. Commitment to multilateralism is so qualified and investment in the United Nations so tentative that common needs have often been sacrificed.

Now, as the General Assembly begins its fifty-first session, we urge again that the international community work collectively for substantial change, reflecting a more equitable sharing of political and economic power. This call for reform is made even more urgent when we consider that the premises by which international relations are conducted today continue to perpetuate a grossly unjust system.

The systematic abuse of power by the major countries has continued. They apply selective sanctions and double standards on the developing world to promote their narrow national interests. Clearly disregarding multilateralism, with its inherent qualities of mutual respect and shared interests, the North continues its vice-like grip on all spheres of international activity, including politics, international trade, development, the environment and the media to name a few.

Elitism exercised by the major countries is frequently cloaked in the guise of globalism or of serving the common interests of nations. However even a cursory examination of this brand of globalism reveals it to be sanctimonious, if not hypocritical. For example, under the pretext of safeguarding international peace and security, the nuclear-weapon States maintain their right to destroy, or threaten to destroy, all life on this planet. Yet these countries deny others even the right to use conventional weapons for self-defence.

Malaysia deeply regrets the lack of a consensus on the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty but welcomes its subsequent adoption at the fiftieth session of the General Assembly. We worry about nuclear aspirations in our region and in Israel. To a large extent, the refusal of the nuclear-weapon States to adopt a timetable for nuclear disarmament is responsible for this situation and seriously flaws the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Malaysia is encouraged by the recent International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons. To render the Court's finding meaningful, there should be serious efforts made towards accelerating the process of nuclear disarmament, including the early convening of a special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

While these major Powers advocate peace and condemn arms races by others, their industries aggressively develop and promote the sales of defence technologies and weapons of death. Like a drug dealer supplying his helplessly addicted victims, the northern-based arms industries keep poor countries mired in a cycle of poverty and insecurity, laying waste vital human skills and resources.

Perhaps such political elitism comes naturally to these powerful countries, many of which were imperial Powers before. A clue as to their priorities for the global agenda is to be found in the recent communiqué of the economic summit of the Group of Seven. Reform of the United Nations, in particular the Security Council, as an urgent issue, gave way to the pre-eminence of the globalization of the world economy. And so, the Security Council remains a blunt instrument of the foreign policies of the permanent members.

In the context of a globalized world, much is made of the terms "interdependence" and "mutual interests". Multilateralism has been elbowed aside. Yet multilateralism is the foundation of the international relations and cooperation which the United Nations symbolizes. From now on, globalization will take over and nations will lose their sovereignty.

Consider the current financial crisis that faces this Organization. The United Nations is on the verge of bankruptcy, being held to ransom by its major donor country, the wealthiest nation in the world. That country refuses to meet its assessed and legally due contributions, yet insists on maintaining its hegemony on global management.

The major Powers' solution to the United Nations stalemate is to speak of revitalizing the United Nations as if they were conducting a corporate downsizing exercise. While it is important to end bureaucratic inefficiencies and the wasteful use of resources, we should be mindful that the United Nations is not a business. Overconcentration on internal-management issues can deflect the attention of the United Nations from its major global responsibilities. While Malaysia is critical of the United Nations and its leadership, we cannot but regret the tendency of major Powers to assign the United Nations complex tasks, missions impossible, without

clear mandates and authority or adequate resources. How does the United Nations undertake peacekeeping operations without the authority or the means to keep the peace?

We find the inequities of power-sharing in the United Nations to be intolerable and view with alarm prevailing trends towards weakening this Organization further. Already, the centre of gravity for all principal economic decisions that affect developing countries lies in the undemocratic Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and of course the self-appointed Group of Seven.

Strengthening multilateralism requires a reform of the Bretton Woods institutions, which dominate the development scene. These institutions are operating against their general mandate. Decision-making is undemocratic and untransparent. Despite their specific mandates to facilitate development and regulate the international monetary system, these institutions are used to discipline third-world countries and to act as debt collectors for the rich North. It is salutary to note that the World Bank collected a net amount of $7.2 billion in 1995 in debt repayment over and above what it disbursed in aid to the poor indebted countries and raked in a profit of almost $1.5 billion. The International Monetary Fund has now become an enforcer of the dictates of market lenders and is assuming the role of a global rating agency.

The majority of poor developing countries are saddled with unsustainable levels of debt that preclude them from a share of world prosperity and growth. Debt servicing on current scales is untenable and debtor countries, as a consequence, can do little to alleviate their poverty and misery. The chilling numbers speak for themselves - more is spent on servicing debt than on financing basic programmes for health care, education and humanitarian relief.

The reductions in the commitments for concessional assistance by almost all the industrial countries mark a turning point in international development cooperation. Bluntly put, the rich have reneged on solemn commitments and pledges. The cut-backs in pledges for the replenishment of international development assistance and the unwillingness to clear earlier arrears, triggered by a unilateral decision of the major contributor to scale back its contributions, have led other donors to scale back their contributions as well.

Now that the concept of globalism is so intimately linked with international trade, it is important critically to examine the realities of this so called "free trade". The painfully long history of the Uruguay Round negotiations should have forewarned us that the WTO, although established as a rules-based multilateral organization to regulate international trade, will become answerable only to the world's wealthiest economic Powers. Like the Bretton Woods institutions, the WTO remains outside any relationship of accountability to the far more democratic United Nations General Assembly.

During the Uruguay Round, the developing countries discovered that, instead of negotiating international rules on trade in manufactured goods, the rich countries of the North had widened the agenda and pushed for liberalization in economic areas where they clearly have an advantage, in particular, financial services and investments.

Even though some countries of the South have benefited from the liberalization of trade — and Malaysia is one of them — the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) nevertheless harbours new threats to developing and newly emerging economies. Not only have the poor countries of the South to struggle uphill merely to meet the basic needs of their peoples, but they are now bullied into adjusting their economic policies to meet their new obligations under GATT so that northern-based corporations can penetrate and capture their markets. The poor may not reserve their markets for themselves even when they have no capacity to penetrate the markets of the rich.

Fair competition and level playing fields are only for the rich. For example, their attempts to link the environment and labour standards to trade in manufactured goods is a clear attempt to deny developing countries their meagre competitive advantage. The relationship between trade and labour standards emerged not because of a concern for the well-being of workers in poor countries, but as protectionist moves aimed against growing and competitively-priced imports from the South.

To compound this unfair interpretation of the multilateral trade rules, we find that, when it comes to the transfer of technology, the northern countries take a fiercely anti-liberal stand, insisting that all WTO member States compulsorily introduce a set of national laws to protect intellectual property rights. Since most patents are owned by the North, this in effect means legal protection of their technological monopoly and a drastic curtailment

of the right of developing countries to have access to new technology.

It appears, therefore, that the northern interpretation of "free trade" and "liberalization" are slogans that in reality mean liberalization when it benefits the North but protectionism if it can block the South. Thus, while goods and capital are permitted and encouraged to move around the globe, labour and technology may not. Even as we are asked to submit to GATT rules and the WTO, we find one country blatantly undermining the WTO by enacting extraterritorial laws that must be submitted to by all nations and their companies on pain of excommunication.

The GATT also fails to protect the genetic resources of the South while allowing genetically modified materials to be patented. We now have a situation where theft of genetic resources by western biotech transnational corporations enables them to make huge profits by producing patented genetic mutations of these same materials. To what depths have we sunk in the global marketplace when nature's gifts to the poor may not be protected but their modification by the rich becomes exclusive property?

There are of course many winners and losers in the world of the WTO, but we are concerned that the major losers will soon again be the poorest and most marginalized countries. A small number of developing countries, like Malaysia, have benefited. But let me point out that our gains have been achieved through thrift, productivity and the ingenuity of our people, hard-earned fruits of our labour. Lest it be forgotten, our new-found prosperity has also benefited those in the developed countries. Our products are competitively priced, thus contributing to lower inflation in the rich countries. Our prosperity has provided vast and expanding markets for the goods of rich countries, thus creating jobs and helping to lower their unemployment rates.

The term "globalization" has become the buzzword of our times. In the G-7 communiqué, globalization was touted as

> "a source of hope for the future ... responsible for the expansion of wealth and prosperity in the world." (*A/51/208, annex II, para. 2*)

However, some would argue that globalization, with its objectives of breaking down borders and sucking the countries of the world into one single economic entity, has eclipsed multilateralism or attempts to masquerade as the same thing. Indeed, globalization has been described by the rich as a

> "new global partnership for development". (*ibid., annex II, IV*)

If the current behaviour of the rich countries is anything to go by, globalization simply means the breaking down of the borders of countries so that those with the capital and the goods will be free to dominate the markets. Colonies in the former British Empire will remember "Imperial Preference" when they were made the exclusive markets of the metropolitan Power. Globalization can mean just that, except that the world market will belong to the rich nations. Linkages to non-trade issues will prevent the poor from ever challenging the rich, in the same way that the colonies were not allowed to industrialize.

We do indeed live in a brutal and unjust world, where the astonishing developments in science and technology and our increasingly sophisticated knowledge base are not matched by the ability of Governments to marshal forces to overcome the social and economic inequities of their countries. The facts and figures are well documented and widely known, but they are worth repeating just to jog our conscience — if we still have one. What are the universal values of this globalized world when increasing numbers of people in both the North and South live in abject poverty? A fifth of the human race — 1.3 billion people — lack access to the most basic necessities, such as food and clean drinking water, while preventable hunger and disease kill 35,000 children throughout the world every day. The 1996 United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Report states that, in the past 40 years, the richest 20 per cent of people have seen the differential between themselves and the poorest 20 per cent double.

Are we expected to believe in the sincerity of the rich countries when they talk about a new global partnership and the achievement of sustainable development, when the fact is that, today, we have over 20 million environmental refugees in addition to an equal number of traditional refugees? Why should the developing countries accept the twisted lexicon of northern development-speak when "development assistance" means that the net flow of wealth from poor countries to rich has increased to at least $400 billion a year when the terms of trade, transfer pricing, debt servicing and the brain drain are taken into account.

Wading through the obstacles of this strife-torn world is a critical dilemma that faces the international community today. It is one of international leadership and the failure to deal with these critical issues. Instead, we witness a persistent abnegation by the major Powers of the responsibilities that accompany the rights and privileges of such authority. We must determine the type of world and society we want to live in, and this should be based on truly universal values.

As we approach the next millennium and as the pre-eminence of transnational forces has blurred the definition of national sovereignty, we must seriously question why a powerful minority is still allowed to bankrupt and coerce the majority to meet its narrow economic and political needs. The poor are no longer independent. They have already lost control over their own currency. And now they have lost their borders too.

Freedom of the press is touted as a basic democratic principle. But control of the media by a handful of western corporations has made nonsense of this principle. Proclaiming to be windows on the world, the western media, manipulated and censored by those in control, invariably manage to distort reports so as to put anything happening in the South in the worst possible light. Anything positive in the developing countries is ignored.

The growth and influence of electronic, satellite and information technology is astounding. But its impact poses one of the biggest political and ethical challenges of our time, subverting and distorting our social consciousness. The elites of the North and the South have become blind to the enormities of reality. Events and people are stripped of their context, so that we become less capable of recognizing the common humanity and equal rights of all the people in the world. Pictures of poverty and inequality are no longer received with moral outrage, but have become simple facts of life. Thus begins the process of dehumanization and disengagement from the rest of human society.

Although without a doubt the information age will bring cheap and easy access to knowledge and education and facilitate worldwide business, its abuse is already affecting the moral values of the world. Smut and violence gratuitously distributed by criminals in the North are no less polluting than carbon dioxide emissions nor less dangerous than drug trafficking.

If one great Power can apply its laws to citizens of another country it considers to be guilty of drug trafficking, why cannot countries with different moral codes extradite the traffickers of pornography for legal action under the laws of the offended countries? Why cannot there be international laws and international courts to punish those who spread filth and incite racial hatred and racial violence? Before the whole world sinks deeper into moral decay, the international community should act. Abuse of the ubiquitous Internet system must be stopped.

The monopoly of the electronic media by the North should be broken. As it is, we are getting slanted news, made worse by broadcasters interpreting in favour of their own or their countries' interests. As usual, the poor countries with no role in operating the international media have become the principal victims of world news networks. Not only are distorted pictures of our countries being broadcast, but our own capacity to understand what is happening is being undermined. In the past, Western missionaries spread the Gospel. Today the media has taken over, and all our cherished values and diverse cultures are being destroyed.

The United Nations has not always been a failure. In its early years it helped to dismantle the empires of Western European countries. Malaysia is grateful to it, for it too won freedom because of the moral suasion of the United Nations. But the United Nations now seems blind to what is being done to Iraq and Chechnya. One great Power continues its vendetta against Iraq, firing missiles at distant targets to bring the Iraqi leadership to its knees, oblivious to the sufferings of the besieged Iraqi people. Another Power has shut the gates of mercy on the Chechens, and with rockets and bombs has killed indiscriminately and with appalling brutality in order that Chechnya should remain part of an empire. How much more should the Chechens suffer before the Security Council takes notice? Where are the vaunted defenders of human rights who claim that national borders will not stop them?

It is a fact that every year many statements are made at the United Nations that lament the crises of poverty, third-world debt, human rights abuses, conflicts and wars, social disintegration and environmental degradation. It is almost boring. And yet nothing much has been done which could bring about an amelioration of this sad state of affairs.

Perhaps it is because the processes of intergovernmental consensus decision-making of the United Nations are tedious and frustrating. Perhaps it is

mismanagement by the Governments of so many poor nations which afford many excuses for the rich not to help.

It is of course easy to use the United Nations as a forum to unmask the hypocrisies of both the North and the South, but it is more difficult to work collectively to implement change and solve problems. Still, Malaysia believes that this repetitive criticism is valid and necessary, that international injustice and oppression should not be swept into the dustbins of history. I would like to say again that Malaysia strongly believes in the multilateralism of the United Nations and is prepared to invest in this international Organization with all our strength, beliefs and moral fibre.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of Malaysia for the statement he has just made.

Dato' Seri Mahathir Mohamad, Prime Minister of Malaysia, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, His Excellency Mr. Ro-Myung Gong.

Mr. Gong (Republic of Korea): On behalf of the Government and the people of the Republic of Korea, Sir, I would like to express my sincere congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly. We are confident that under your able leadership the Assembly will take action to revitalize the world Organization, building on the foundation laid by your predecessor, Mr. Diogo Freitas do Amaral of Portugal. My gratitude goes also to the Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, and the staff of the Secretariat for their excellent work for this session.

Mr. Baumanis (Latvia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The most pressing business of this Assembly is to create the architecture for United Nations renewal. The Member States, with vision and determination, need to construct step by step a consensus on reform that will not only bring the Organization out of its present crisis, but will also prepare the world community to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. We welcome the ongoing efforts to strengthen and revitalize the United Nations. But at the same time we must admit that unless progress is accelerated in the months ahead, there is a real danger that the momentum and sense of purpose spawned by the fiftieth anniversary could well be lost.

My Government actively supports the various working groups of the General Assembly as they seek ways to make the United Nations more effective, efficient and democratic. As a member of the Group of Sixteen States in support of renewing multilateralism, we are also pleased to actively participate in the efforts to enhance the principle of multilateralism. The Group's joint statement embodying this principle was reported to the General Assembly last Wednesday by Prime Minister Persson of Sweden, on behalf of the 16 Heads of State or Government.

All these efforts, however, will be of no use if Member States fail either to meet their financial obligations or to make the political compromises necessary to produce a durable package of reforms. Let us not forget that the very principles of multilateralism on which the United Nations was founded are at risk. As was so aptly put by the President of the General Assembly in his 17 September inaugural speech, "the syndrome of 'business as usual'" (*Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, Plenary Meetings, 1st meeting, p. 3*) must be discarded.

Our Organization is in serious financial trouble due to the arrears and outstanding contributions of Member States. The Security Council needs to be modernized to reflect the expansion in United Nations membership, to be more equitably balanced geographically and to work efficiently, transparently and democratically. To better serve the needs of economic development and to reduce duplication, we should undertake a sweeping reassessment of the scores of subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council and of the Assembly itself. While we welcome General Assembly resolution 50/227 as a step in the right direction, much more needs to be done. History will not judge the United Nations on how many committees it forms or how many resolutions it passes, but on how much it does on the ground, day in and day out, to further peace, prosperity and justice for the world's peoples.

Today I would like to focus my remarks on four major challenges facing the United Nations and then to say a few words about the situation on the Korean peninsula.

In considering the architecture for United Nations renewal, we should shape an Organization better prepared

to respond to the following four priority needs: first, restraining the proliferation of dangerous and destructive weaponry; secondly, bolstering United Nations capabilities for effective peacekeeping and peace-building; thirdly, assisting economic and social development while enhancing protection of the environment; and fourthly, improving mechanisms for ensuring respect for international law and human rights.

Calls for a new international order will ring hollow without more reliable controls on the spread of dangerous armaments, particularly those capable of mass destruction. As a supporter of the early conclusion of a comprehensive test-ban treaty (CTBT), my Government heartily welcomed the long-awaited adoption of the Treaty earlier this month. The conclusion of the CTBT will help curb nuclear proliferation in all its forms and will contribute towards nuclear disarmament. As an original signatory to the CTBT, the Republic of Korea aims to ratify the Treaty swiftly. In order for the CTBT to become universal and verifiable, my Government urges all countries to accede to the Treaty at the earliest possible date.

While the Conference on Disarmament failed to reach consensus on the CTBT, the Conference, through two and a half years of intense negotiations, was instrumental in articulating the eventual Treaty. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Conference and to assure the Assembly that the Republic of Korea, as a new member of the Conference, will spare no efforts to contribute to its vital work.

Despite much progress towards a world free of nuclear weapons, the Korean peninsula still faces the threat of nuclear proliferation. North Korea has yet to achieve nuclear transparency. Once again, my delegation urges North Korea to comply with its obligations under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards in a comprehensive manner, and to implement fully and faithfully the Framework Agreement between the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We also renew our call on North Korea to live up to its obligations under the South-North Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Until they are eliminated from the face of the Earth, chemical and biological weapons too will pose a grave threat to humanity. Towards this end, the Republic of Korea, as an original signatory to the chemical weapons Convention in 1993, recently concluded the domestic procedures to ratify the Convention. We look forward to its swift entry into force, for universal adherence to the Convention is critical to achieving a total ban on chemical weapons. My delegation therefore strongly urges those countries which have not yet joined the Convention, including the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, to do so as early as possible.

Moreover, my Government, which acceded to the biological weapons Convention supports the efforts to introduce a strict verification system into the Convention. Both of these non-proliferation measures are essential building blocks for world peace.

My Government, moreover, shares the international concern over the millions of anti-personnel landmines scattered throughout the world. We are looking forward to working closely with other Member States to minimize the suffering and casualties among innocent civilians caused by these indiscriminate weapons. To this end, I am pleased to announce that the Republic of Korea will again extend its moratorium on the export of anti-personnel mines for another year.

The second priority for United Nations renewal should be to adapt and bolster its uniquely valuable peacekeeping and peace- building work to meet new challenges. Following several years of rising expectations and expanding mandates, Member States have developed over the past two years a more sober appreciation not only of the limits of United Nations capabilities but, more important, of their own willingness to provide the requisite material and human support for a more ambitious role for the world body. Both the scope and the nature of peacekeeping operations are being tested as the demands for United Nations involvement remain high in a world confronted by an alarming number of intra-State conflicts and acts of terrorism.

Today's peacekeepers are often required to undertake diverse tasks such as monitoring violations of human rights, staging elections, rehabilitating civic institutions and reintegrating combatants and refugees into peacetime society. Thus, peacekeeping now directly contributes to peace-building and conflict prevention. Post-conflict peace-building, by rehabilitating a country's war-ravaged economic and social base, can serve to prevent the recurrence of conflict. Member States should recognize, however, that the broadening of peacekeeping objectives should be matched by an expansion in the resources and capabilities of the United Nations for carrying out these tasks. Peace, too, has a price.

Recently, several promising proposals have been put forward for enhancing the rapid deployment capability of the United Nations. We consider the United Nations system of standby arrangements — currently comprising of 59 countries, including the Republic of Korea — to be an innovative and practical mechanism for coping with emergency situations. We also believe that the growing interest and participation of Member States have boosted the credibility of the system of standby arrangements, making it easier to secure the consent of parties in a given conflict to United Nations peacekeeping involvement. In addition, we support the establishment of a rapidly deployable headquarters team within the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, as proposed by the friends of rapid deployment. The Korean Government is willing to detail personnel to the team as part of our contribution to strengthening the United Nations rapid deployment capability.

Since we first dispatched an engineering unit to the United Nations peacekeeping operation in Somalia in 1993, the Republic of Korea has contributed to many peacekeeping operations around the world. We intend to expand our participation in terms of human resources, and material and political support for practical steps to improve the peace-management capacity of the United Nations.

In an uncertain world, terrorism poses an ever-present threat to international and domestic peace and security. Having been a direct victim of terrorism, the Republic of Korea strongly condemns all acts of terrorism. We urge the international community to take firm action to contain and combat terrorism. The 1994 Declaration on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism clearly states that terrorism in all forms is not only criminal, but also unjustifiable under any circumstances, regardless of political, ideological, ethnic or racial motivation. My Government reaffirms its strong commitment to join the ongoing efforts to eradicate terrorism worldwide.

Economic and social development should also remain a high priority at a time when scientific progress and information technology are globalizing the world economy at a rapid pace. Driven by unprecedented levels of cross-border trade and investment, globalization presents new opportunities to bolster economic development and improve quality of life. Nonetheless, we must not lose sight of the detrimental effects of this trend, which threaten to leave some developing countries increasingly marginalized.

The United Nations has an obligation to try to help those least developed countries, particularly in Africa, that are truly in need. My delegation fully supports the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative for development in Africa, a joint undertaking by the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions launched last March. We look forward to joining other Member States in a common effort to bring this worthy endeavour to fruition.

Having risen from the devastation of the Korean War, the Republic of Korea has achieved sustained economic growth and advancements in living standards over the past three decades. Seeking to share the lessons of our own development experience, we have worked to help other developing countries apply two key elements of our own growth: capacity-building and human resource development. The Korean International Cooperation Agency is implementing diverse programs to assist other developing countries in this regard. At the same time, Korea will increase its voluntary contribution to the operational activities of the United Nations by 120 per cent during 1996-97. In these and many other ways, we are determined to participate in United Nations efforts to bring about economic and social progress throughout the world.

Since 1994, my Government has worked with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to establish the International Vaccine Institute in Seoul. This Institute will be dedicated to capacity-building for developing countries in the development and use of vaccines, particularly for children and the impoverished. The official launching of the International Vaccine Institute will take place in New York on 28 October. We would encourage as many countries as possible to show their support for this worthy and noble project by becoming party to the agreement.

The emergence of unprecedented global environmental issues, such as climate change and biodiversity, calls for genuine global partnership based on equitable burden-sharing. The special session on environmental issues of the General Assembly in 1997 will provide us with a valuable opportunity to formulate a clear, sustainable development strategy for the twenty-first century. On 5 June 1997, immediately before the special session, my Government will co-host World Environment Day, together with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), as part of our efforts to contribute to the resolution of environmental issues.

The fourth theme for United Nations renewal, in our view, should be to reinforce the unique United Nations capacity for codifying, monitoring and encouraging

respect for international law and human rights. As the Charter so eloquently attests, genuine peace and stability depend upon a healthy respect for international law and human rights norms. The continuing United Nations commitment to human rights and social justice was reaffirmed by a series of international conferences during the 1990s. They include the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, in 1993, and the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995.

In particular, the Beijing Conference underscored the critical principle that gender equality — through the protection of women's human rights and the eradication of all forms of violence against women — forms the foundation of a sound and prosperous society. The Republic of Korea is committed to maintaining its support for international efforts to advance the status of women.

All of us need to do more, however, to help the United Nations live up to its potential for promoting human rights. Its mechanisms for furthering respect for universal human rights need to be reinforced and upgraded across the board. We need to enhance the coordinating role of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and of the resources of the Centre for Human Rights. The Korean Government will do its best to make a meaningful contribution to this end.

Envisioned since the Nuremberg and Tokyo Tribunals of a half century ago, the idea of an international court to punish crimes against humanity is now being materialized, even as the Yugoslavia and Rwanda Tribunals are struggling to bring to justice criminals who have committed genocide and other mass crimes. A preparatory committee is refining the draft statute of the international criminal court, prepared by the International Law Commission. We look forward to the early establishment of the court, which we believe will deter violators of human rights. We also welcome the establishment of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, which should contribute significantly to the strengthening of international law and order.

The road to democracy in the Republic of Korea has been long and difficult. Indeed, laying the foundation for democracy in a developing country is never easy. It requires a vigilant public conscious of democracy and human rights and a government willing to nurture the will of its citizens. This has been and will remain a primary objective of the Korean Government. We are making every effort to promote further human rights and democracy through the enhancement of our legal and institutional mechanisms.

My Government has also been active in the endeavour to assist the democratic impulse throughout the world. Lending our support to the electoral assistance activities of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, we provided a dozen election monitors, as well as supplies, for the international operation to ensure free and fair elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the past, we also participated in the electoral observer missions in Mozambique, Cambodia, South Africa and Palestine.

Let me now turn to the situation on the Korean peninsula. Despite the easing of tensions worldwide since the end of the cold war, the Korean peninsula continues to be a source of instability, posing threats to the peace and security of north-east Asia and beyond. Unfortunately, the tides of openness and reconciliation that swept other parts of the world have not yet reached the Korean peninsula, the last remaining legacy of the cold war.

Last week North Korea dispatched a military submarine to infiltrate armed commandos into the South. We uncovered this infiltration when the submarine ran aground on the shore of Kangrung, a city on the South Korean east coast, and 26 armed agents are believed to have come ashore. Of these, 21 were killed and one was captured. According to the captured agent, the armed infiltrators were all military officers from the North Korean defence ministry. Subsequent examinations also revealed shocking findings. The 11 North Koreans found dead on the day of the landing were apparently killed by their cohorts for reasons unknown.

The investigation is still under way to find out the purpose of the infiltration and other details, but the findings to date present a strong possibility that last week's infiltration is part of a larger-scale infiltration operation.

This brazen act of military provocation by North Korea constitutes not only a serious infringement of our territorial waters and sovereignty, but also a blatant violation of the Armistice Agreement. It also clearly demonstrates that North Korea still seeks Korean reunification by any means, including the use of force. Needless to say, this act of provocation poses a direct threat to peace and stability on and around the Korean peninsula.

We once again urge North Korea immediately to renounce its absurd goal of unifying Korea by force and

to pursue peaceful coexistence with the South. The North should also abide by the Armistice Agreement and end any attempt to disrupt the current armistice regime.

We also take this opportunity to renew our call on North Korea to accept our proposal for four-party talks involving both Koreas, China and the United States, which will enable constructive negotiations for the establishment of a lasting peace on the peninsula. In the absence of Pyongyang's positive response and given the seriousness of North Korea's violation of the armistice, my country firmly believes that the Armistice Agreement should remain in full force.

At the historic fiftieth session of the General Assembly, we took a collective look at where the United Nations had been and where it was going. In an open and forward-looking spirit, we compared visions of the kind of world body that will be needed to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. Now, with this fifty-first session, comes the hard part: redoubling our collective commitment to the world body so that it can become a means for translating our visions into realities.

Together, we can fashion the architecture of United Nations renewal. Can we achieve harmony out of diversity? Can we refocus our energies on the four priorities of stemming the spread of weapons of mass destruction, bolstering United Nations peacekeeping and peace-building capabilities, advancing sustainable economic and social development, and reinforcing our joint commitment to international law and human rights? The answer to these questions must be a resounding collective "yes". The Republic of Korea stands ready to make its share of contributions, through the United Nations, to meet the challenges of the next century.

The Acting President: I now call on the Representative of Malta, His Excellency Mr. Joseph Cassar.

Mr. Cassar (Malta): May I congratulate the President on his new responsibilities and pay tribute to Mr. Freitas do Amaral of Portugal. During last year's jubilee session, his persistence furthered this Assembly's revitalization process.

Less than a year ago, world leaders met in this Hall to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations and renew their commitment to the Charter. The world community rejoiced. Hope had survived the darkness of the cold war. Trust in the United Nations was, however, tempered by an awareness of the difficulties threatening its survival and the aspirations of the peoples it represents. Could the Organization address the new phenomenon of instability which risked sapping its capacities and resources? What prevailed was a pragmatic assessment. The alternatives to the United Nations were either that of attempting to reinvent the wheel or scuttling this forum of dialogue and cooperation to have arrogance and chaos usher in the new millennium.

We, the peoples, can ill afford war. Rhetoric can never cancel the grief and destruction it generates. The United Nations was founded to save succeeding generations from this scourge. Notwithstanding the then-widespread colonialism and the angst of bipolarism, the world community worked to contain the risk of war. As the ability to destroy grew, so did the potential of States to be annihilated. Brave, bold steps required clear vision and a commitment to peace. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, extended indefinitely last year, is a monumental landmark in this arduous quest. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is another milestone. Malta co-sponsored the resolution that led to its adoption by the General Assembly and is honoured to have been amongst its first signatories.

The challenge remains. We must generate broader confidence to ensure universal adherence and compliance to these treaties and others, including the Chemical Weapons Convention. Procrastination in their ratification by the States that matter most could expose them to the danger of becoming dead letters. Malta welcomes the commitment expressed by President Clinton of the United States of America in this regard.

The risk of world conflict, though remote, is still present. The total horror of a nuclear holocaust induces an in-built restraint. This is not the case with conventional armaments or weapons of mass destruction. Millions of victims of local and regional conflicts — be they dead, maimed, refugees, displaced, widowed or orphaned — continue to torment the conscience of humankind. These tragedies spur us to pursue initiatives which foster security and confidence. The call for a ban on the production, export and use of anti-personnel landmines has Malta's full support. The seven-point programme of action proposed by the Foreign Minister Kinkel of Germany provides a good basis for progress.

We must melt the bastions of suspicion. Only a consolidated regime of confidence-building and disarmament measures can buttress belief in and

commitment to the peaceful settlement of disputes. This process requires regional and international concerted action. Malta has been active in promoting security and cooperation in the Mediterranean. Malta and France have both made proposals for a stability pact for the Mediterranean. The sharing of concerns among countries afflicted by common problems can help overcome them. This and other initiatives could turn our sea of turmoil into one of mutual trust.

Malta's foreign policy is both inspired and dependent on the notion of regional stability. It continues to sustain our efforts at greater Mediterranean cooperation. It inspired our proposal to have the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe declare itself a regional arrangement in terms of Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter.

The enlargement of the European Union, of which Malta expects to become a full member in the near future, provides a unique dimension of the process of regional cooperation. Malta welcomes the statement made by Deputy Prime Minister Spring of Ireland on behalf of the European Union. It reflects the common values which have always inspired the European process and led to the consolidation of democracy, prosperity, social justice and solidarity. In the framework of the structured dialogue, Malta has worked with its European Union partners on key issues to promote peaceful coexistence, cooperation, development and progress within the world community.

Malta supports the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. Cooperation in the political, security, economic and financial areas cannot but yield results. Social, cultural and human relations are other important aspects of this partnership. Malta has always seen its application for membership of the European Union in terms that encompass the economic and the broader political dimensions. The successful outcome of the negotiations on Malta's accession, due to start in the coming months, will further strengthen our contribution.

Interlocking institutions of the European security architecture, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Partnership for Peace and the Council of Europe, have strengthened the distinct areas of cooperation on which security depends. We must identify and combat threats to peace as they emerge.

We have witnessed the horror of intolerance based on nationality, race, creed or political belief. Agonizing conflicts and acts of terrorism have shattered lives and trampled upon the rights and dignity of whole populations.

Such events have shocked us into action. The establishment of the ad hoc Tribunals and the current negotiations on the establishment of an international criminal court, which Malta fully supports, are proof of the varied manner in which the United Nations responds to new needs.

The road to peace, through the compromise of negotiated settlement, is not always immediate or popular. Yet, it is the only path. Reconciliation does not happen of its own accord. It requires courage and leaders who stretch out their hand to their adversaries and build, brick by brick, the edifice of stability.

The universally acclaimed processes which rekindled the hope of settlement in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Middle East are parts of this noble task.

The implementation of agreements reached between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, the resumption of negotiations and the full realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are indispensable for stability in the Middle East. The international community must continue to assist this process. Malta welcomes the first meeting between Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Arafat. The most recent incidents of violence in Jerusalem and Ramallah in recent days give rise to great concern. The momentum of achievement should not be dissipated by acts which erode the confidence built thus far.

The people of Cyprus have thirsted for peace and unity for too long and also deserve the attainment of a just and long-lasting settlement.

In this Hall, recognition was always and exclusively reserved for peacemakers. It was never bestowed on warmongers, aggressors or cynics who constantly doubt and discourage others from building hope.

The United Nations Children's Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme and United Nations actions in Palestine, Namibia, Cambodia and Mozambique are part of this Organization's history in contributing towards the well-being and development of peoples, peacekeeping and peace-building. The success achieved should not be robbed of merit by instances where it is lacking. Are not the Blue Helmets across the globe a signal of engagement? Are not negotiations on preventive

diplomacy a commitment to addressing the root causes of tension and conflict? Are not our deliberations on development means to create stability and well-being at the local level?

In 50 years, we have created a range of tools to promote cooperation. True enough, our tools need perfecting. We must calibrate them to current realities. Tools, however, need to be used. A shed full of perfect, but unused, tools never provided any farmer with a livelihood. Only the will to operate tools and invest energy where it matters helps to reap the fruit.

The future demands a more action-oriented approach: more time in the field, rather than pondering in the shed. This resolve inspires us as we follow up the United Nations conferences on the environment, human rights, population, social development, women's rights and human settlements. The World Food Summit is another example of action.

Renewed focus on development has led to various initiatives, including those specific to Africa. Partnerships forged by the European Union and Japan with the developing world reflect active cooperative involvement. Achievement registered by a number of developing States underlines the benefit of such undertakings. The dialogue instituted between Non-Aligned Movement, the Group of 77 and the Group of Seven is an important and welcome step.

Malta's academic institutions, in collaboration with United Nations agencies and the Commonwealth secretariat, annually sponsor and organize a number of training programmes. Most fall into the category of the training of trainers. Students from the developing world and from countries with economies in transition have attended short- or long-term courses and are now back in their countries directly contributing to development.

Malta, through its Government and non-governmental organizations, regularly donates funds for a number of humanitarian and overseas development aid programmes. These initiatives, together with the traditional involvement of Maltese teachers and social workers in the developing world as volunteers from non-governmental organizations or members of religious orders, symbolize our national commitment to international solidarity.

We view our collective achievements with pride. Each convention and treaty agreed upon by the international community is a testimonial of our common will to build a better life, each a symbol of our resolve to beat our swords into ploughshares. Yet, the anguished sea of faces of millions of children denied the right to hope still haunts us, whether it is war, famine, or exploitation which generates misery. Our collective future can never be secure until these children acquire the right to smile in hope and to their fair share in the bounties of society.

Cynicism and fatalism cannot cure us of social ills. Blended with hope, pragmatism yields reward. What is more pragmatic than the care of the destitute to which people like Mother Theresa dedicate their lives. One person less going to bed with an empty stomach, one person less torn with pain, one person less denied shelter — small pragmatic steps inspired by the innate dignity of each human being; acts of caring solidarity which each individual, each family, each community is capable of; commitment to others generates hope. Each ounce of food which alleviates famine; each drop of water which combats drought and desertification; each dose of medicine which contains the spread of disease; each book which kindles knowledge helps build a better world.

Democracy, the rule of law, free and fair elections and constant vigilance in the promotion and protection of human rights are the guarantors of peace. International election observer missions are an important contribution to confidence-building. Malta has participated in this process, most recently in Palestine and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As much as action is instrumental, so is restraint. Emissions which pollute the environment; lumbering which depletes the rain forests; indiscriminate trawling which exhausts our fishstocks — even if disguised as economic imperatives — undermine efforts towards sustainable development.

Malta looks forward to this Assembly's 1997 special session to follow up and update the Rio achievements.

We have strategies and action plans. Now is the time for dynamic engagement. Present and future generations demand that we use these instruments to combat drug trafficking, illicit arms transfers, money laundering and organized crime, which sap the life of the communities we built with so much effort.

My Government is totally committed in this regard. Legislation adopted has strengthened the arm of the law in apprehending traffickers, halting the flow of drugs and confiscating illegal funds accrued. This determined policy

is bearing fruit. Malta supports the convening of a General Assembly special session in 1998 comprehensively to address drug trafficking and related issues. Poland's proposed convention to fight transnational crime has been noted with interest. Regional and international cooperation on these issues remains the key to success.

Our children have a right to a life free from fear in a safer world. That remains our responsibility as parents and policy makers.

The United Nations is often accused of lacking in its assigned role. Yet the United Nations is what Member States make of it. They decide on its future. United Nations reform requires discipline in our operating methods. We have to discard self-imposed fetters and act with the revived spirit that our times demand.

Tempered by the fires of conflict and the lessons of the League of Nations, the founding fathers built into the Charter a balance worth preserving. Reform should not be reduced to a simple juxtaposition of organizational charts. Only by revitalizing the spirit that gives our Organization life and purpose will we achieve the ideal of nations large and small working in unison for a better world.

As President of the General Assembly at its forty-fifth session, in the immediate aftermath of the cold war, my Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Guido de Marco, called for reflection and action to better the symbiotic relationship between the United Nations principal organs. Since then working groups have been set up to discuss restructuring.

Within the Security Council reform group, work has evolved, but it is still far from reaching common ground. There is consensus that the Council should be expanded and be more representative. The type of expansion and the categories are still subject to a wide divergence of views. Malta looks forward to an expanded Security Council that best serves the world community. On the merits of increasing the Council's permanent membership, we still have an open mind. The very nature of permanence demands that we establish clear and exact criteria on required qualifications for present and future candidates.

Giving due recognition to changes in international relations and the nature and extent of the contribution of States towards tasks assigned to the Council, we must avoid rigid stances or those that may be construed as such. There are a number of compromise proposals that could help us find a solution, even if temporarily. We have listened with great attention and positive interest to Foreign Minister Dini explaining the Italian proposal as one which takes into account both the special contribution of a number of States and the right of all States to serve on the Council regardless of their size, wealth or military might.

Only understandings between States that win the confidence of all can assist us in surmounting existing obstacles. We are satisfied to note the consensus existing on bettering the important qualitative relationship between the Security Council and the General Assembly. Changes introduced in the working methods of the Council are an indication of a universal positive disposition.

The Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations system has registered significant progress and tackled a variety of complex issues. Malta has consistently advocated greater efficiency and a more effective role for the General Assembly to dissipate negative perceptions that may exist. Responsibilities of this Assembly, of which we are all permanent members, are many and varied. We have already noted the benefits of streamlining. More is required. Our deliberations have an impact on public opinion and political contingencies. We would be remiss if indifference or bureaucratization were to numb us from fully assuming the responsibilities and obligations imposed by the Charter.

Starting with the forty-fifth session, my Deputy Prime Minister has also called for a review of the role of the Trusteeship Council. Creating or abolishing institutions necessarily has an impact on the principles on which they are based. The balance characteristic of the Charter needs to be enhanced rather than diluted. The United Nations should continue to cherish all principles on which it was founded, including the notion of trust, on which the Trusteeship Council rests.

Last year, Malta submitted a resolution seeking the opinion of States on the Trusteeship Council's future. The diversity of views expressed is indicative of the existing potential. Malta looks forward to further discussion on the subject, confident in the will to better utilize existing institutions to serve the principles of the Charter. Our common heritage and the welfare of future generations demand that in reorienting the United Nations we preserve and protect the vision and ideals that gave it birth.

Thirty years ago Malta launched the concept of common heritage. This concept has become ingrained in

the reality of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the International Sea-Bed Authority. It takes time for ideas to mature and consensus to emerge. The most recent development, which we welcome, is the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, to be inaugurated at Hamburg, Germany, next month. Those institutions will undoubtedly continue to contribute to the underlying principle of trust in protecting and preserving our common heritage.

The financial crisis facing the Organization has dampened hopes and discouraged many. Malta believes that the ongoing exercise of assessing costs, eliminating waste and rationalizing structures must go on. Although pruning is essential to strengthen the United Nations, so also is the need for all Member States to meet obligations and to pay their assessed contributions to the regular and peacekeeping budgets, in full, promptly and without conditions. Discussion on the scale of assessments will also contribute to improving the financial base of the Organization.

"Bankruptcy" is an awful word. It is too often repeated in relation to the United Nations. Finances are undoubtedly a cause of common concern. There is, however, another threatening phenomenon which looms — moral bankruptcy. This is by far the greater danger and the one that we should fear most.

With the end of the cold war, a second-generation United Nations had to find in its Member States the resolve and commitment to face winds of change that at times assume the force of gales and whirlwinds. With a steady hand on the rudder and our eyes fixed on that guiding star that inspired the founding fathers, we can still bring ship to port. The fate of humankind is our precious cargo and responsibility.

The Acting President: The next speaker is His Excellency Mr. Jaime Gama, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Portugal.

Mr. Gama (Portugal) (*spoke in Portuguese; English text furnished by the delegation*): I should first like to congratulate the President of the General Assembly on his election and to express our confidence in his capability to conduct the work of the current session. In congratulating him on his election, I am pleased by the fact that he represents a country, Malaysia, with which Portugal has excellent relations in addition to deep historical and cultural ties.

I believe that it is understandable that I should also take this opportunity to pay tribute to the outgoing President, my fellow countryman Mr. Freitas do Amaral, for the dedicated, competent and innovative manner in which he directed the work of the fiftieth session of the General Assembly.

I wish also to express to the Secretary-General my admiration for the manner in which he has carried out his functions during a period in which the United Nations has been called upon to take an ever more active role in a variety of aspects of international life.

My colleague from Ireland has already addressed the Assembly on behalf of the 15 member States of the European Union, expressing positions to which Portugal fully subscribes. Nevertheless, I would like to reflect on some questions that are of particular importance to my country.

Allow me to point out that while speaking in my capacity as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Portugal, I am also speaking as a representative of a country that is extremely proud to belong to the Lusophone Community. This is probably the newest international organization, and as President of its Council of Ministers, I foresee an important role for it in the concert of nations, in useful and effective cooperation with the United Nations and its agencies. It represents a strengthening of the solidarity and fraternity that unite these countries and will empower the economic and social development of its peoples, while affirming and disseminating the Portuguese language, which is the common heritage of over 200 million people scattered over every continent.

The Lusophone Community, made up of Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe and Portugal, is a political project based on the Portuguese language, which is the historic bond and a common heritage of the seven countries, despite geographical separation. It will always be an open forum, based on mutual support and close relationships with all Portuguese-speaking communities of the world and cooperation with other, similar organizations.

One year after the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary, we are still far from meeting the expectations created and the real needs of the Organization. It is clear that a process on this scale can be realized only in the medium term.

A core issue of the reform process that we must address is the resolution of the serious financial crisis of the United Nations. We believe that the resolution of the crisis can be found through three essential approaches: the fulfilment of commitments, in full and on time; review of the scale of assessments in order to reflect the capacity of Member States to pay; and financial rigour and rationalization of existing resources. In the spirit of contributing to the resolution of this crisis, Portugal voluntarily increased its 1995 contributions to the peacekeeping budget, moving from Group C to Group B in the scale of assessments. That decision will result in a five-fold increase of our initial contribution.

Equally important is the reform of the Security Council. We are convinced that only with an adequate and balanced representation of all the world's regions will the Security Council be more democratic and, consequently, more effective in the formulation and implementation of its decisions.

When considering the process of reform, I must also refer to issues related to the Agenda for Development and the Agenda for Peace. With regard to the former, we must recognize the need to review the entire system of international aid for development and consider the role the United Nations should play in this domain.

The integrated and sustainable development we propose should be pursued in all its facets, not only in the economic field, but also in the consolidation of democratic institutions. To meet these objectives, it will also be necessary to implement the decisions taken at the major United Nations global conferences, as it has been at those conferences that the Agenda for Development has gradually taken shape. This question is all the more important to us in Portugal, since we focus special attention on the North-South dialogue, which is attested to by the fact that the North-South Centre is located in Lisbon.

Aware of the fact that today the important task in this area is to help the developing countries, especially the more vulnerable ones, Portugal has gradually increased the funds it sets aside for development aid, both at the bilateral level and through the framework of international organizations of which it is a member. In this context, our official development assistance exceeds the goal established for donors at the Paris conference in 1990.

At the multilateral level, allow me to single out the importance we attribute to the Lomé Convention as a vital instrument of aid and cooperation between the members of the European Union and the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. Thus, we have strongly advocated a review of the Convention based on maintaining the principles of partnership and cooperation.

Maintaining international peace and security undoubtedly continues to be the priority challenge faced by the United Nations. The results achieved in most of the relevant missions lead us to conclude that we should not lessen our commitment or the dynamism of our activity.

It is true that the United Nations cannot abdicate its mission of helping to restore peace. We also believe, however, that efforts should be focused on conflict prevention. But in both areas, the question of cooperation between the United Nations and regional intergovernmental organizations has been discerningly raised. This can be seen in some recent successful examples, such as the joint action of the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Western European Union (WEU), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Union (EU) in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, organizations of which Portugal is a member and in which it participates actively.

Another component of the efforts towards peace is disarmament. Portugal welcomes the adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). Portugal, which will contribute significantly to the CTBT verification system, has signed and will shortly ratify the Treaty, and appeals to all Member States of the United Nations to do the same.

It is urgent that the process of enlarging the Conference on Disarmament be completed, as well as that of deliberating on its agenda and the rules for decision-making and for admission of new members, which should be improved. It is increasingly essential to seriously debate nuclear disarmament, with a view to achieving the ultimate goal of the permanent eradication of nuclear weapons. We advocate that the Conference on Disarmament should, early at its next session, begin negotiations on a treaty for the banning of the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons.

With regard to the serious problem of anti-personnel landmines, Portugal hopes that concrete measures will be taken this year towards a complete prohibition of the manufacture and export of those devices of death and

destruction. For our part, we have already decreed a moratorium on the manufacture and export of such weapons. Furthermore, I would like to mention that on 23 August last my country ratified the Convention on the banning of chemical weapons.

Among the many activities of the United Nations, I would like to single out two areas which I consider essential: the environment and human rights.

The protection of the environment is becoming an increasingly prominent issue. In this field, we recognize the great importance of the problems of climate change, desertification and the protection of the marine environment. For this reason, Portugal has been closely following the implementation of the principles and decisions adopted in this regard at major United Nations conferences.

I would also like to underline the particular sensitivity of Portugal, whose territory includes two archipelagos — the Azores and Madeira — to questions relating to the sea from a perspective of the development of balanced management of fishing and marine resources. To this end, my country is currently concluding the necessary procedures that will soon permit it to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Furthermore, on Portugal's initiative, the General Assembly, at its forty-ninth session, declared 1998 International Year of the Ocean. Focusing on this subject, Expo 98 will be held in Lisbon that same year, with the theme, "The oceans: a heritage for the future". Its central focus will be the relationship between the current state of knowledge on marine resources and the urgency of ensuring, through a rational and scientific management process, a greater ecological equilibrium on our planet.

The defence and promotion of human rights is one of the principal concerns of Portuguese foreign policy. We believe that it is the responsibility of every Government to guarantee in their respective countries the full enjoyment of all human rights, but that it is also legitimate for the international community to concern itself with ensuring the promotion and protection of those rights around the globe.

We consider that the United Nations has a key role to play, and thus it is indispensable that the High Commissioner and the Centre for Human Rights be provided with adequate human and financial resources for the fulfilment of his important task.

A constant pursuit of Portuguese foreign policy has been to stress the need to find a political and diplomatic solution to the question of East Timor, without which it will not be possible to put an to end the systematic abuses of human rights that continue to prevail in that territory.

Portugal has repeatedly stated — and I do so here once again — that its sole objective, apart from the immediate concern of defending the human rights and identity of the people of East Timor in their different aspects, is to find a just, comprehensive and internationally acceptable solution to the question of East Timor, in accordance with international law and the full respect for the rights of its people, namely its right to self-determination.

Despite the difficulties that have been encountered, the difference between the substantive positions of Portugal and Indonesia and the slowness of the process, we continue to be committed to finding such a solution through dialogue and under the auspices of the Secretary-General, whose patient efforts I wish to pay tribute to here. In the pursuit of that objective, we consider it extremely important to continue the active association of Timorese representatives to that process, which deserves the unequivocal support of the international community.

In this regard, I must note here the increasing support that this question has received from the international community, namely through the adoption of positions that range from the resolutions of the European Parliament to the declarations of the 21 Heads of State and Government of the member countries of the Ibero-American summit, and include the common position adopted this year by the 15 member States of the European Union, to which a further 14 European countries associated themselves.

Portugal, exercising its responsibilities as administering Power of the non-self-governing territory of East Timor, will continue to cooperate constructively with the United Nations, with full regard for the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant resolutions, towards the indispensable conclusion of the process of decolonization in East Timor.

In this era, at the close of the millennium, marked by such profound changes and close interdependencies, we believe that the African continent deserves special attention from the international community. To that end, all efforts should be pooled towards the creation of conditions that will permit it to benefit from a

development process similar to that enjoyed by other *regions of the world*.

We are therefore acting in the context of the international organizations of which we are members, with the aim of preventing the marginalization of the African continent and ensuring that it receives priority treatment on the agenda of the international community.

Because we actively uphold this view, Portugal has proposed to its European Union partners that a Euro-African summit take place, open to the participation of all African States without exception, so as to allow for a political dialogue at the very highest level on issues of mutual concern. The goal is to achieve a new dimension to our relations and provide a further impulse to traditional areas of mutual cooperation in order to create the foundations of a new global partnership. The 15 Member States of the European Union have already recognized the interest and importance of this initiative.

In this manner, we are seeking to include Africa in all its aspects on the international agenda, stressing, on the one hand, the scale and economic potential of the African continent, which is deserving of a new approach and a new model for dialogue, and, on the other hand, encouraging African countries to embark on their own process of development based on the promotion of peace, democracy, stability and economic and social progress.

We supported from the very beginning the creation and establishment of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution by the Organization of African Unity at the Cairo summit in 1993.

Portugal attaches great importance to strengthening the dialogue between the European Union and the Southern African Development Community. The second ministerial summit, planned for this October in Windhoek, will certainly allow for a global review of the adequacy of the activities undertaken as a result of the Berlin conference.

Portugal, a member of the troika of observers to the peace process in Angola, continues to be particularly engaged in the implementation of the Lusaka Protocol, which seeks, in general terms, the re-establishment in Angola of constitutional democratic life and the formation of a single national army.

I take this opportunity to salute the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Alioune Blondin Beye, whose negotiating skills constitute an important factor in placing peace and hope in a better future once more on the horizon for all Angolans.

We note with satisfaction the positive developments that have taken place over the last few months in the implementation of the Lusaka Protocol, which have permitted the cessation of hostilities throughout the entire territory of Angola. However, we cannot ignore the fact that important tasks remain to be completed, without which the irreversibility of the peace process cannot be guaranteed. The postponement of the resolution of military and political questions is difficult to understand and may jeopardize the process of consolidating peace.

Allow me therefore to recall the concerns expressed in the declaration of the troika of observers — Portugal, the Russian Federation and the United States — issued on 22 August 1996. I appeal to the Government of Angola and to UNITA to continue to follow the path of peace they have set out on in order to contribute decisively to the full implementation of the Lusaka Protocol, namely through one armed force and the creation of conditions for the free movement of people and goods, which would make possible the normal functioning of society, the economy and the institutions in that great African country.

I should also like to appeal to the international community to support the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Angola. In particular, it is urgent that the necessary funds be made available for the implementation of the programmes for the demobilization of former combatants. Social stability is indispensable to the success of the peace process.

I would not like to end this reference to Africa without expressing concern for the situation currently prevailing in the Great Lakes region, which has tragic repercussions on the security and well-being of innocent peoples. Portugal is participating in the efforts of the international community to bring to an end this tragedy of the African continent and to ensure the return of stability to that region.

Portugal did not remain indifferent to the suffering of the peoples of the Balkans or to a situation with serious consequences for peace and stability in the region. Portugal therefore participates in the Implementation Force with a significant military, police and civilian contingent, very often demonstrating a

greater effort and engagement than that of other countries with larger economic capacities.

The recent elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina represented an important step towards the consolidation of peace, and we are confident that they will have a lasting effect on the consolidation of the Bosnian State — based on its two entities — allowing for a self-sustained stability of the country and the reconfiguration of the International Force so as not to affect the fundamental goal of guaranteeing peace and the coexistence of the three communities.

Portugal will be the host country for the next summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which will take place in Lisbon on 2-3 December next. We hope that the 53 Heads of State and Government will take substantial decisions with regard to the cornerstone principles of a security model for the twenty-first century. I am certain that the Lisbon charter, to be adopted at that meeting, will represent a significant step towards the stability of the European continent and the institutional strengthening of the OSCE.

Portugal has promoted closer and deeper ties with the countries of the Mediterranean, especially those of the Maghreb, a region of fundamental importance for the security, stability and development of the entire region. In the short term, it is necessary to adopt confidence-building measures that would contribute to launching the foundations of a new type of relationship between the peoples of both sides of the Mediterranean. Portugal is committed to the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean charter, a matrix for a new partnership that will contribute decisively to the political, economic, social and cultural development of our Mediterranean partners.

Portugal is following with great concern the latest developments in the Middle East peace process.

We believe that the future of the region depends essentially on the will of the parties urgently to restart the negotiations in accordance with the principles of Madrid and the Oslo terms of reference. I appeal to all interested parties to exhibit restraint and to honour previously assumed commitments, which is the only way to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace for the region. The dramatic incidents that have just occurred are the clearest demonstration that there is no alternative to the peace process.

Portugal has very strong human, historical and cultural ties with Latin America. The next Ibero-American Summit, which will take place in Chile, will represent another occasion to debate the important advances that the processes of democratization and development have achieved on that continent. Furthermore Portugal welcomes the holding in 1998 of the seventh Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government.

Portugal welcomes the projects for inter-American regional integration, as well as the mechanisms for cooperation, that have been gradually established between the countries of that continent and the European Union.

The development of a relationship with Asia also constitutes one of the Government of Portugal's foreign-policy priorities. We share a common historical heritage with many countries in that region. At the bilateral level, in addition to opening new embassies in South-East Asia, we will be seeking to strengthen even further our relationship with the Pacific island States, which will certainly be reflected in the framework of the Lomé Convention.

In terms of our multilateral participation, we hope that the new dialogue created in the framework of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) will represent a significant step in the relationship between Europe and Asia, leading to a more open and broader contact on all matters of mutual interest to the European Union and Asia.

The transitional process in Macao, to be completed at the end of 1999, based on a constructive dialogue and close cooperation with China, is of the greatest importance to the Government of Portugal, whose fundamental concern is to guarantee the prosperity and stability of the territory, as well as to preserve its identity.

The multilateral dynamic is undeniably gaining an ever-greater importance in the international realities of the present. Portugal has been developing unequivocal efforts towards strengthening its participation in the organizations to which it already belongs and becoming involved in new multilateral frameworks. Clear evidence of Portugal's attitude in this respect is our increasing participation in peacekeeping operations. Portugal has considerable forces in Bosnia and Angola, and currently has the sensitive responsibility of ensuring command of the United Nations force in the Western Sahara. I am

pleased to note that in the domain of peacekeeping and international security, we are the European Union's sixth-largest troop contributor to United Nations peacekeeping operations, and the ninth largest among those countries that make up the Western European and other States group. We are clearly in the top half of the list of countries that contribute forces to United Nations peacekeeping operations. We also lead other Member States with greater resources and per capita output.

Portugal's candidature for membership of the Security Council should be considered as an important expression of the will of my country to continue to participate, as fully as possible, in the multilateral dimension of today's world. Portugal is a country with a universalist commitment, which is used to establishing contact with many and diverse regions of the world, and to understanding and accepting different cultures and civilizations.

We therefore believe that as a member of the Security Council we would be able to contribute to finding solutions in accordance with the principles and purposes enshrined in the Charter. We also believe that participation in the Security Council by States of a size and with characteristics similar to those of Portugal would contribute to greater equilibrium and representativity in the decisions taken by that body.

This will be possible only when full respect is given to the principle of sovereign equality of all Member States, which, in truth, represents the principal guarantee of democracy in the Security Council. Yet this principle has not been observed in practice. Indeed, out of the 185 Member States, 79 have never served on the Security Council and 44 have served only once, as is the case with Portugal.

We can and should improve this situation. Indeed, to guarantee adequate representation by Member States on the Security Council, obstacles or precedents must not be used that would prevent a healthy rotation in that organ. For these reasons, the Portuguese candidature for membership of the Security Council is based on its own merits. We refuse to resort to any alliances, coalitions or other artificial means that would limit and condition the right of choice of Member States.

Portugal's candidature was not launched to defend interests or to respond to the demands of domestic politics, nor was it launched to pursue or consolidate external ambitions. Portuguese foreign policy is an undivided whole. It is part of, and evolves within, a well-defined geo-strategic space. It is not based on arrogance or economic power, nor has it been altered to accommodate Portugal's candidature. The foreign policy of my country is based consistently on its universalist commitment to dialogue with all the peoples of the world.

Before concluding, I should like to cast my vote of confidence in the future of the United Nations and to reiterate Portugal's full commitment to the reform of the Organization.

The Acting President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Niger, His Excellency Mr. André Salifou.

Mr. Salifou (Niger) (*interpretation from French*): It gives me great pleasure to convey to Mr. Razali Ismail the heartfelt congratulations of the delegation of Niger on his outstanding election to the presidency of the United Nations General Assembly at its fifty-first session. His election is testimony to the high esteem and prestige enjoyed by his country, Malaysia, in international affairs for its contribution to the attainment of the ideals of our Organization. It is also recognition of the fact that he is a seasoned diplomat and a man of great experience.

I extend my congratulations to the other officers of the Assembly, and we assure Mr. Razali of the full cooperation of the delegation of Niger in the discharge of his duties. I should like to convey to his predecessor, Mr. Diogo Freitas do Amaral of Portugal, our great pleasure at, and our compliments on, the excellent job he did during his presidency.

The President of the Republic of Niger, General Ibrahim Maïnassara Barré, reaffirms his unreserved support for and encouragement to the Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, for his tireless efforts for peace and development. As the Assembly knows, this support was demonstrated to the Secretary-General at the recent Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), when my country joined the unanimous tribute to him.

I know that my country's decision to propose one of our sons as a possible candidate for the post of Secretary-General has given rise to much comment. Let me here make it clear that Mr. Hamid Algabid, the candidate in question, is simply a "candidate for the candidacy". In other words, if in the coming weeks no veto opposes the re-election of Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali as Secretary-General, Africa would only stand to gain. It would be

perfectly normal for a son of our continent, who is just as qualified as his predecessors, to enjoy, as they did, a second mandate at the head of our distinguished Organization.

The annual session of the General Assembly gives my country an opportunity to renew its faith in the ideals and principles of the United Nations Charter. The fiftieth anniversary of our Organization, which we commemorated last year, gave us an opportunity to look at the progress made and to define the priorities on which we should focus. Among those priorities is joint action by the international community to reduce the economic imbalance between the nations of the North and the nations of the South. Unfortunately, the map of economic and social development of the world contains a geography of contrasts and disparities, although there were reasonable hopes that the end of the cold war would facilitate the mobilization of the international community for development.

Everywhere, and more specifically in the countries of the South, poverty is the greatest threat to political stability and social cohesion. The destitution of the shanty towns, the destitution of the street children, and absolute poverty are a disgrace to us all, and they will be as long as we see marginalization as inevitable. As the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Frederico Mayor, stated so well:

> "From poverty to marginalization, from marginalization to exclusion: this is how the most fertile breeding ground for violence is created."

It is this violence which we must avoid, by offering better alternatives to the peoples to whom we are responsible — most particularly in Africa. Indeed, this continent shows signs of being a land full of vitality, capable of major economic achievements, if the international community gives us a chance and the resources. Accordingly, the commitments jointly entered into in the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s are as relevant as ever. And more than ever they require that greater efforts be made for Africa by other members of the international community.

The question of external debt, and in particular the question of multilateral debt, which was given special attention at the G-7 summit in Lyon deserves radical, urgent treatment. Niger fully supports the recommendations adopted at the mid-term review of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa. We welcome the launching on 15 March 1996 of the United Nations System-wide Initiative on Africa. We hope that this programme, which is in any case an important framework for cooperation, will make it possible to ensure sustainable economic and social development in Africa.

Official Development Assistance — quite rightly identified as one of the main conditions for the revitalization of the African countries — should be increased to the level indicated in the resolutions adopted on this subject. At the upcoming Singapore meeting of the World Trade Organization appropriate follow-up action should be taken to ensure that the rights and interests of all countries, and in particular of the African countries, be protected. Likewise, the provision of technical and financial assistance to implement horizontal and vertical policies to diversify exports will give African countries the means for greater economic independence.

Since the end of the cold war, our Organization has certainly had some success in the maintenance of international peace and security. Among these successes was the coming into being of a democratic and multiracial South Africa and the end of the disastrous war in Mozambique. We have also made significant progress in the peace process in Angola, in the crisis in the Middle East and in the former Yugoslavia, in particular the holding a few days ago of elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Niger is following closely the efforts undertaken by the authorities in Rwanda to overcome the aftermath of the tragic events we all witnessed and in particular to consolidate national reconciliation and lasting peace.

The situation in Liberia has seen a change for the better after the recent Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) summit devoted to that country. Niger supports the recommendations which emerged from it and has decided, despite our own financial difficulties, *inter alia*, to strengthen the structure of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in Liberia by sending a contingent of about 500 men. My country believes, however, that these efforts will only be successful with the valuable support of the international community, which *inter alia* must honour its commitments to this country.I take this opportunity to commend the tireless efforts made in Liberia by Nigeria, the great friend and brother of Niger.

Somalia also deserves support. My country has been following with great interest the evolution of the situation

in Western Sahara and hopes for a resumption of dialogue between the two main protagonists there so that, in the near future, efforts by made by the United Nations will finally lead to the self-determination referendum which the international community hopes to see. Concerning the sanctions imposed on Libya, Niger believes that the constructive proposals made by the authorities of that country provide a serious basis for negotiations to resolve that crisis, the consequences of which are adversely affecting the Libyan people as well neighbouring countries.

In the Middle East, for three years now, considerable progress has been made on the path to peace. Until recently, President Arafat, living among his own people, was developing a dialogue with his former enemies that, while certainly difficult, was also useful. With the support of the international community, that dialogue must go on. But unfortunately, since the return of the right wing to power in Israel, all hopes seem to have been dashed. Our Organization must shoulder its responsibilities and do everything in its power to stop the Middle East from plunging into a new war with unforeseeable consequences. If the State of Israel has the right to exist and to live in peace, the same goes for all States in the region — beginning with Palestine.

Niger is similarly concerned about the serious situation in Jammu and Kashmir and hopes that the international community will discuss it further. It is indispensable that in that region of the world as well, and with the encouragement of all countries of good will, that wisdom and dialogue prevails, so that in the near future the people of Kashmir can finally exercise freely their inalienable right to self-determination.

Disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, have a central role to play in conflict prevention and the promotion of peace and economic and social development. This is why Niger renews its appeal for universal accession to international conventions and treaties that relate to weapons of mass destruction, and in particular to the cornerstone treaty: the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Further efforts should be made to control conventional weapons and, generally speaking, to establish confidence-building measures among States. The signing of the Treaty of Pelindaba, on the creation of a nuclear-weapon free zone in Africa, was a source of legitimate pride. My country welcomes the adoption here in New York of the important Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, which finally puts an end to the fears of millions of human beings for their lives and for their environment. It is certainly a significant step towards nuclear non-proliferation. Niger was among the sponsors of the resolution submitted by Australia, and will be signing the Treaty in the near future. We hope that this stage, which puts an end to the risks of horizontal proliferation, will lead to a substantial reduction in existing arsenals.

Finally, as in previous years, my country will join in initiatives to be taken to combat illicit trafficking in small arms. It will also join the increasingly unanimous condemnation by the international community of the manufacture and use of those deadly devices: anti-personnel landmines.

The building of a better world, which is our common goal, is still dependent on the establishment of international relations based on the principle of cooperation and human solidarity. We have had major discussions on this subject: in Rio on the environment, in Cairo on population, in Copenhagen on social development, in Beijing on the promotion of women, in Istanbul on human settlements, and soon, in Rome, on food. All the concerns of humanity have been taken into account in the many important recommendations which emerged from those conferences and which outlined a vision of a better world. We believe that only genuine human solidarity can transform that vision into reality.

Before concluding, I would like to provide an overview of the political solution in my country. Niger is one of the African countries which, early on, chose the path of democracy. In less than five years, it has tried everything: a national conference, democratic transition, and free and transparent elections which established the institutions of our Third Republic. Following the dismissal of the Government by the National Assembly, and the dissolution of that Assembly by the President of the Republic, the ensuing elections brought about the victory of the opposition and the establishment of a power-sharing regime marked by institutional instability in which the higher interests of the country were sidelined. The resulting paralysis of State structures prompted the army to seize power. Understand me clearly: I have no wish to justify military *coups d'état*. But in Niger, the putsch was the lesser evil. At least that is how it was perceived by the people of Niger, who spontaneously organized demonstrations in support of the new regime.

As I speak to you now, Niger, having elected a new President, General Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara, is now preparing for legislative elections. The Government is doing this in cooperation with the opposition, which only last week finally agreed to hold discussions with the representatives of the presidential party and to define with it the conditions for organizing future popular elections. The two parties have agreed to abandon sterile polemics and to create the calm conditions so necessary to work effectively in the higher interests of Niger.

This shows that Africa in general, and Niger in particular, is not allergic to democracy. But in the matter at hand, what my country wants is to be given the opportunity to build to its democratic system — based, without question, on respect for human rights and freedoms — at its own pace, taking into account its own political, economic, social and cultural context. And I venture here to say that one of the dominant features of African culture is that we do not turn public administration into a dichotomy between those in power and the opposition, between those responsible for running the country and those who are excluded from that process. In Africa, we do everything together. We work together, we eat together and we manage things together. Of course, in the interest of the human community to which everyone belongs, everyone should know his rightful place in this process and everyone should play the role he has been given.

In this regard, I would like to add that even just in our subregion, West Africa, there are several examples of countries that have understood this process and that are fruitfully applying it on a daily basis. This is the case of Senegal and Burkina Faso. Let us try to find in our culture — or better in our cultures — all the elements that can enable our countries to establish a viable, properly adapted democracy, while also rejecting categorically any kind of ready-to-wear democracy that might be foisted upon us.

In conclusion, allow me to reaffirm Niger's faith in the ideals of the United Nations and in its ability to find in the solidarity of all its Members appropriate responses to the new challenges facing humanity.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.